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Salt Marsh

Thicket - Maritime Forest

Sheltered from salt spray or riddled with mosquitoes on windless summer days is the island's interior. It's a wild place of freshwater grasses, shady pine groves, secluded pickets of sand, and dense shrub thickets. Deer roam freely here. Notice Red Fox tracks - a cat-like print in single file; and listen for the bright musical call of the song sparrow which has a tiny black spot on its breast.

Behind the Primary Dune

Secondary Dune

Swale

Primary Dune

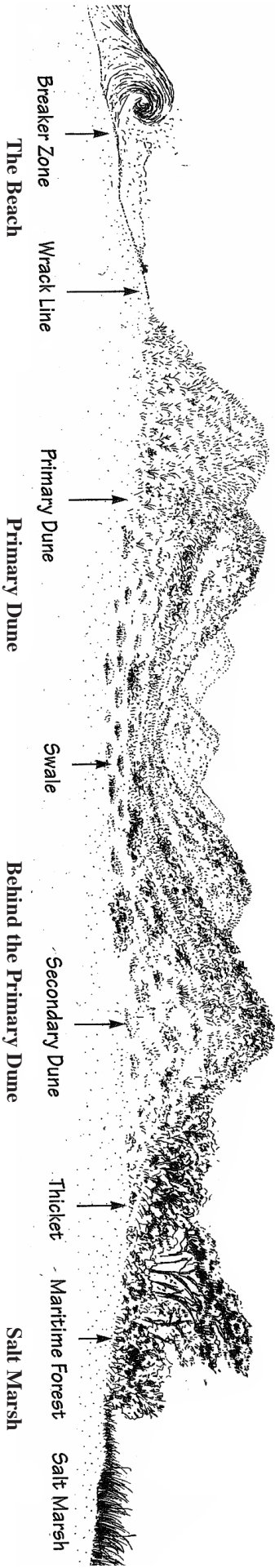
Primary Dune

The Beach

Breaker Zone

Wreck Line

Above the surf line is a seasonally changing beach profile, especially towards summer's end when a sharp ledge forms. Beach sand is primarily composed of white quartz. Occasional black magnetite and red garnet color Smith Point's sand in patches along the upper beach. As you travel along the beach, study the pattern of the dunes. You may find this pattern broken by various types of disturbances. Foot trails, off-road vehicle paths and storm surges all can seriously impact dune structure. Avoid impacting the dunes as they provide a "front line" barricade against the ravages of ocean winds and waves.



Shadbush - vertically striped bark and white spring blossoms.

Pitch Pine - evergreen with three needles in a bundle.

Myrtle Warbler - bright yellow rump.

One of the many brightly colored, song birds of the area.

like fall fruits with large pits.

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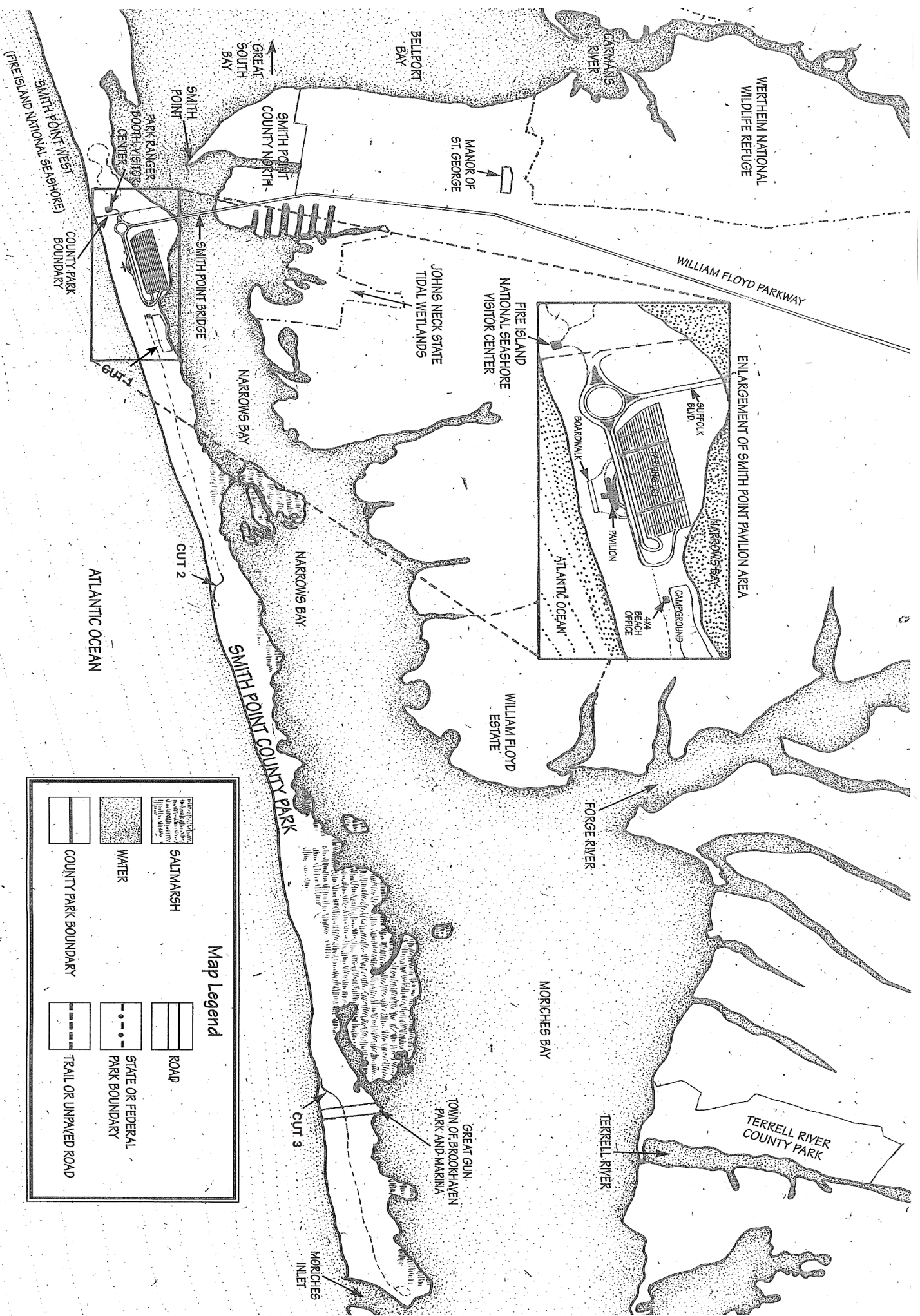
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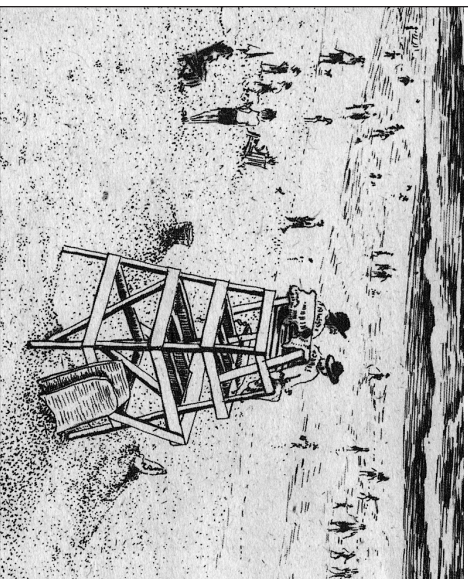
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A Heritage of Rescue

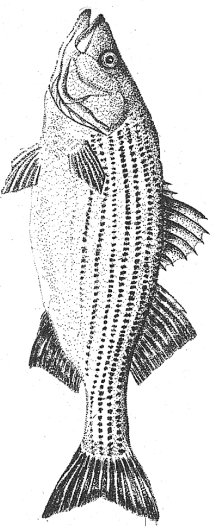
From 1640 to 1915, more than six hundred ship disasters occurred off Fire Island. The shifting sand bars off Fire Island made navigation treacherous. Equally treacherous high sea rescues were performed by the volunteers prior to the development of the U.S. Coast Guard. Later, with the assistance of the Life Saving Benevolent Association, and State and Federal funds, rescue huts equipped with six-oared, white life boats and other life saving equipment began to spring up along the barrier beach.

Today, Smith Point's nationally recognized lifeguards rescue swimmers instead of ships and are skilled in understanding the sea. They can spot a rip tide (a dangerous outgoing current) by the observance of sandy turbulence. Their advice: if caught in a rip tide, relax and swim laterally towards the shoreline. Lifeguards also watch for 'the sweep' which is the long shore current and 'spilling waves' which slap and pound the shore. But they admire 'slipping waves,' gently breaking forward in a picturesque white. Most of all, lifeguards remain respectful of the sea and warn us to always swim with a buddy.



Smith Point Time Line:

- 1686 - William Tangier Smith of England moves to America and secures a license to buy land from Native Americans. He sets up a whaling station at Smith Point.
- 1901 - Charles Howell leases and operates a beach pavilion.
- 1910 - Initial foot bridge built from mainland to Smith Point. Completed in 1916. Ice wrecked the bridge the following year.
- 1920s- Political figure Robert Moses dreams of a major highway down the backbone of Fire Island.
- 1931 - Nor'ester forms Moriches Inlet.
- 1938 - Hurricane forms Shinnecock Inlet. Many homes at Smith Point are lost. Westhampton flooded under six feet of water. Salt spray defoliates trees five miles inland.
- 1944 - County acquisitions begin at Smith Point.
- 1950s- William Floyd Bridge building begins. Plans for development of Fire Island continue. Scientist Robert Cushman Murphy initiates a grass roots effort for preservation.
- 1964 - Fire Island National Seashore and Smith Point County Park are established.



Striped Bass

Though a fish of shallow coastal waters, Long Island "stripers" spawn in the freshwaters of the Hudson River, and the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays. In the ocean, Striped Bass surf through the breaking arc of a wave, feeding upon small bait fish by opening their wide mouths. Though once in decline from overfishing and other factors, this tasty fish is making a strong comeback. The NYSDEC sets a minimum size limit for "keepers." All fish under that size must be returned to the water. Please check with Park personnel for the current standards.



Piping Plovers

With sand-colored backs and a melodious "peep-lo" call, Piping Plovers are delicate, small birds of the shoreline and upper beach. They breed in spring, and lay speckled eggs in nest depressions they create in the sand on the open beach. In the summer months, Piping Plover pairs take turns sitting on their clutch of eggs, providing both shade from a burning sun and warmth against chilling ocean breezes. If you are distracted by a Piping Plover that appears distressed, it may actually be trying to lure you away from its young. Avoid their territories which are usually marked with orange- flagged, string fences. Piping Plovers are an endangered species. What follows is a brief shorebird key:

- **Piping Plovers** - compactly built, wide neck, bill short and nearly cylindrical.
- **Sandpipers** - medium sized, long slender bill. Black-billed Sanderlings run near the surf with fast moving legs.
- **Terns** - pointed bills, forked tails. The Common Tern, orange with black tipped bill, will hover and plunge aggressively. The endangered Least Tern (nesting area is upon bare dunes and may be fenced off) is smaller with a yellow bill.
- **Gulls** - Typical gulls include: Herring (flesh colored legs), Ring-billed, Laughing (with a black head), and Black-backed